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The constitution of 'third workspaces' in between the home and the corporate office

Sytze F. Kingma

This study analyses the constitution of commercially provided work spaces situated in between the home and the corporate office. These new workspaces are enabled by digital network technologies. Theoretically, this new category of contemporary business spaces is conceptualised as 'third workspaces', with reference to the work of Oldenburg (1989), Soja (1996) and Lefebvre (1991 [1974]). Empirically, these workspaces are explored in two ethnographic case studies dealing with recently founded and successful third workspace providers. The grounded theory resulting from these case studies addresses the role of the material settings, the technologies, the work ideologies as well as the user practices. Overall this study offers an analytical framework for studying and managing third workspaces, and highlights the ambiguities in the constitution of third workspaces between the design and management on the one hand and the user practices on the other.

Keywords: work space, flexible working, case studies, grounded theory, new technologies, sociology.

Introduction

In between the private home and the corporate office a new category of flexible workspaces has emerged, that is enabled by new technologies and can be flexibly hired by knowledge workers. In this study this category of workspaces will be conceptualised as 'third workspaces', with reference to the work of Oldenburg (1989), Soja (1996) and Lefebvre (1991 [1974]). Empirically, these third workspaces will be grounded with two Dutch ethnographic case studies dealing with commercial organisations offering third workspaces. These case studies explore the role of the material settings, the technologies, the professional work ideologies as well as the user practices which characterise third workspaces.

As specialised and commercially provided temporary workspaces, the case studies represent a recent phenomenon. However, in the first decade of the 21st century, third workspaces worldwide quickly increased in significance. An international 2011 survey of nearly 18,000 business owners and senior managers across 60 countries claimed that almost half of them used third workspaces for any or all of their work time (Strelitz, 2011); this use was roughly equally divided over informal spaces and specialised business centres, such as the ones analysed in this study.

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The third workspace providers of the case studies can on the one hand be distinguished from shared workspaces such as the Betahaus in Berlin (Lange and Wellmann, 2009) and the Beehive in Paris (Fabbri and Charue-Duboc, 2013), and can also be distinguished from business incubators (Hacket and Dilts, 2004). The third workspaces can further be conceived as part of the wider trend of workspace differentiation and flexibilisation. In addition to the emergence of third workspaces, this transformation encompasses the flexible use of (first) home workspaces in terms of 'teleworking' (Cooper and Kurland, 2002; Peters and Heusinkveld, 2010) and the flexibilisation of (second) office spaces in terms of 'hot desking' or 'nomadic working' (Chen and Nath, 2005; Bosch-Sijtsema *et al*., 2010; Hirst, 2011), as well as 'mobile working' en route in between all of these workspaces (Brown and O'Hara, 2003; Hislop and Axtell, 2009). This study seeks to contribute to the literature on flexible working with a phenomenology of third workspaces. In this respect it is directed towards the development of a conceptual framework.

First the theoretical background and sensitising concepts will be outlined. Subsequently, the case studies and methodology are introduced. After that the two case studies are analysed. Finally, the findings are discussed and conclusions are drawn.

Theoretical perspective

In conceptualising third workspaces, this study refers in particular to urban sociologist Oldenburg's seminal work on *The Great Good Place* (Oldenburg, 1989) and social geographer Soja's seminal work on *Thirdspace* (Soja, 1996). Both works define, be it in quite different ways, a third kind of space. In the case of Oldenburg this concerns the concept of 'third places' and in the case of Soja the concept of 'thirdspace' (Soja, 1996). Although different, both conceptions can be regarded as complementary for conceptualising third workspaces. In combining these two this study draws on Lefebvre's theory on *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]). More generally, this study is inspired by the renewed interest in the material dimension of organisations (Kornberger and Clegg, 2005; Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Dale and Burrell, 2008; Orlikowski and Scott, 2012). Although in this literature space and technology are usually treated separately, the study of new, ICT-driven modes of working, of which third workspaces are part and parcel, require the combined analysis and study of the interaction between space and technology.

Of the two sources of inspiration, Oldenburg's concept of third places is the most concrete. Oldenburg defines third places as concrete places beyond the home (the first place) and work (the second place) with characteristic historical institutional features, of which 'informal public life' is perhaps the most prominent one:

> The third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work. (Oldenburg, 1989: 15)

Among the variety of public places Oldenburg lists are the following: cafes, coffee shops, community centres, beauty parlours, general stores, bars and hangouts. The social functions of third places are implied in the primary features Oldenburg identifies. Third places offer in his view: a neutral ground, social equality, democratic conversation, accessibility, the presence of regulars, a low profile, a playful mood and psychological comfort (Oldenburg, 1989: 20–42). This study develops a comparable range of concrete features for third workspaces. In fact, there are clear indications that third workspaces cultivate, at least in part, informal and democratic relationships, the exchange of information and the creative atmosphere identified by Oldenburg (Fabbri and Charue-Duboc, 2013). This also bears upon the 'social norms' dimension of work spaces as highlighted by Hislop and Axtell

(2009: 63), who draw attention to the informal norms which constitute acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in particular locations. Hislop and Axtel added the social norm dimension to the seven 'work location/task' dimensions (of time, space, concentration, impression management, confidentiality, (un-)predictability and communication requirements) for working on the move, as outlined by Felstead *et al.* (2005).

Compared to Oldenburg's approach, Soja's concept of thirdspace is more abstract. Soja defined thirdspace not as a concrete type of space but as an abstract *perspective* on space which in the social sciences emerged as an alternative to the firstspace perspective of 'concrete materiality' and the secondspace perspective of 'ideas about space'. The third perspective is characterised by a distinct epistemology of space:

> I define Thirdspace as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality-historicality-sociality (Soja, 1996: 10).

Soja was critical about the rigid focus in the spatial disciplines of architecture and geography on concrete space on the one hand and the professional ideas about space on the other. This 'dual mode' of thinking should in his view be extended with a 'new' or 'other' third mode, which is concerned with spatial imagination, as expressed in Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' (Foucault, 1986) and Lefebvre's concept of 'lived space' (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]). This third perspective, or 'an-Other' form of spatial awareness, emerged in Soja's view in the spatial crisis of the 1960s (Soja, 1996: 11–12).

Comparably, in the case studies, this study will explore the spatial awareness and processes of spatial production as the outcome of creative and contradictory spatial imaginations. In fact, there are clear indications that third workspaces are characterised, at least in part, by the openness and strategic flexibility of Soja's approach. Kornberger and Clegg (2005: 1105), for instance, have advocated the 'generative building', which is designed to encourage workers to be 'creative and passionate'. Generative buildings are characterised by 'chaotic, ambiguous and incomplete space'.

Although Soja also significantly engaged with Foucault's spatial concepts, Lefebvre's 'trialectics of spatiality' clearly constitute the overall framework of Soja's approach, and also form this study's major conceptual framework for the analysis of third workspaces. Moreover, Lefebvre's theory of space arguably makes it possible to combine Soja's thirdspace with Oldenburg's third places, in the sense that we can understand an Oldenburgian functionalist classification of concrete workspaces as resulting from a dialectical process of interactions between contradictory and abstract spatial dimensions.

Lefebvre's formal theory on space revolves around the distinction between three spatial perspectives, which address the inter-relationships between the epistemologically distinct ways in which actors relate to space. Lefebvre distinguishes analytically among: the 'perceived', the 'conceived' and the 'lived' space. The taken-for-granted nature of spatial environments is typically addressed in the spatial practices of the 'perceived space', which we routinely reproduce during the course of everyday life (Shields, 1999: 163; Watkins, 2005). Lefebvre's conceptions further address power relations by comparing the confrontations between the explicitly designed spatial regimes of the 'conceived space' with the actual user practices of the perceived space on the one hand and the subjective, alternative meanings of the lived space on the other (Kingma, 2008; Peltonen, 2011; Wasserman and Frenkel, 2011). This emphasis is relevant in the context of third workspaces because the explicitly designed business solutions for third workspaces are usually provided by the market, while it is at the same time crucial to include the user experiences. The great advantage of Lefebvre's theory is that it makes it possible to study the spatial practice of third workspaces in interaction with both the

professional and technological framing of these practices and the active meaning-making processes of the users of third workspaces (Taylor and Spicer, 2007: 335). It is in the interaction among these three dimensions that third workspaces are actually produced.

The case studies and methods

The case studies concern two organisations that commercially provide specialised flexible workspace. In addition to workspace these organisations facilitate knowledge work with a social and technological infrastructure for socialising and knowledge sharing. For most users, the third workspace is not the only workspace they use. It is part of a wider 'workscape' (Felstead *et al.*, 2005: 16–18), including workspaces at home, at clients' sites, at companies and/or mobile workspaces. Although comparable in the overall objective, the two temporary workspace providers of the case studies differed in several respects: the rules of participation, markets, prices, specific facilities, layout, staffing and work ideology. The case studies were developed one after the other, in 2012 and 2013, respectively. The first organisation will be addressed with its pseudonym MeetingPlaces (MP) and the second with its pseudonym TransportPlaces (TP). The research design of both case studies overlapped to a considerable extent but also deviated in some significant respects. The 'conceived space' was explored by studying official documents, websites, advertising and four (two MP and two TP) formal interviews with staff and managers (Table 1). The 'perceived space' and the 'lived space' were explored by about 2 weeks of participant observation in total per case, with several informal talks and discussions with staff and users, and in total 21 (9 MP and 12 TP) formal interviews with thirdspace workers. Pictures served to analyse and compare the architecture and design of the third workspaces. A significant difference between the MP and the TP case studies involved the selection of a single establishment in the MP case, whereas in the TP case the fieldwork was scattered over a wider range of 11 establishments; the fieldwork visits to these latter establishments averaged about half a workday. The informants were in the TP case recruited at various (four different) establishments. The TP case was thus not only used to compare with the MP case but also to enlarge the spatial scope of the research over company establishments and Dutch cities.

MeetingPlaces was founded in 2008. Until spring 2012, at the time of the fieldwork, the organisation quickly expanded and opened 55 establishments in the Netherlands. The case study concerned a single establishment, hosted in a regenerated factory building in a major Dutch city. The case of MP was specifically focused on the category of self-employed individuals, a specific target group addressed in the marketing of MP. TP was founded in 2010 and expanded until spring 2013, the period of the fieldwork, to 11 establishments at major railway stations. Compared to MP, TP primarily focused on the corporate market and transport connections. In size and services there was a considerable overlap between MP and TP.

Table 1: Interviews with third workspace workers

	Interviews	Age 40+	Self-employed	Unemployed
Male users	4 MP, 6 TP	7	7 MP	1 MP
Female users	5 MP, 6 TP	4	5 TP	1 MP
Providers	2 MP, 2 TP	—	—	—
Total	25	11	12	2

The data analysis was based on the principles of 'grounded theory' (Bernard, 2002: 463 ff; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Suddaby, 2006). These principles include the methods of 'constant comparison' and 'theoretical sampling', which implies that the research evolved in an iterative process in which the researcher selects informants and develops conceptual categories and fills them with data until a certain level of saturation of the categories is reached, that is until the insights become increasingly repetitive. In this way data collection and analysis are a simultaneous process. During observations, but also while conducting interviews, new themes and new directions and opportunities for the research emerged. This way, inductive and deductive coding was combined (Bernard, 2002: 464–465).

Grounded theory is first and foremost directed at making statements about how actors interpret and construct reality. Grounded theory does not imply that one can do without literature and substantive theory (Suddaby, 2006). The research was clearly guided by the theoretical notions outlined in the previous section. At most, these notions were bracketed during the fieldwork to be able to engage the informants with an open, unprejudiced mind and focus on their understanding of third workspaces. The objective was not to develop a completely 'new' theory, but rather to elaborate, refine and substantiate the third workspace theorising with the case studies.

The findings will be discussed in three sections. Firstly discussed are the perceived space or the routine user practices that emerged among the third workspace users. Secondly discussed are the conceived space or the intentions behind the professional design and management of the third workspace providers. Thirdly discussed are the lived space or the reflexive and critical appreciation and modifications in the use of the third workspaces. After presenting these findings, this study concludes with a discussion of how the third workspaces are actually produced in the ongoing interactions between these three analytical dimensions.

The perceived space

In exploring the routine user practices, both by observing them and by discussing the patterns in the interviews, these work practices in two ways seemed to reinforce the positioning of third workspaces as in between the home and the corporate office. First, the users identify the third workspaces with a new generalised business-like office architecture, rather than with particular work activities. The third workspace thus constitutes a spatiotemporal 'work container', a relatively autonomous spatiotemporal work setting. This setting sets the third workspace apart from both the home and the corporate office. Second, the users integrate third workspaces in personalised business networks with multiple worksites, including the corporate business sites of potential employers, clients and providers. These sites are all connected with an encompassing virtual network environment, with which the third workspaces are connected and from which the third workspaces can be perceived as alternative work settings. This network architecture enables the users to integrate third workspaces both materially and symbolically with the business world. The analysis of the perceived space addresses the self-evident spatiotemporal practices, and particularly focuses on routines and the (un) intended consequences of the use of third workspaces.

Combining workspaces

All informants regarded the inclusion of third workspaces in their work routines as a significant spatial innovation in their personal work life. Before they integrated third workspaces in their work routines, they used to work at home and/or at an employer's office or client's site. The informants now used the new option of third workspaces to accommodate various degrees of temporal work.

And these work activities were largely organised around digital network technologies. Digital technology did not only facilitate work within third workspaces but at the same time connected and enabled the continuity of work between the various spaces of diversified workscapes. Most, if not all, informants frequently used their laptops and mobile phones at home, on the road, at client sites and potentially also at the company office. What they lost in spatial presence at a particular site, they won in temporal presence across all work sites. In this sense, they traded space for time.

For most of the informants, their laptop constituted their mobile office and their smartphone their mobile secretary. Of course, their digital work was, to various extents, always embedded in material environments, such as a workspace and face-to-face contact. However, all interviewees agreed that without digital devices and an Internet connection their work would be impossible, as this self-employed business consultant argued:

> You only need Internet, a laptop and a phone, that is all you need to work. I manage six websites with my laptop. And if I don't have a laptop I use my smartphone for this, everything is on there as well. Everything is connected to each other. My laptop even comes with me on vacation; you can get online almost everywhere nowadays, so if I have to work I can. If you are in a rush you can do it on your smart phone, they can be seen as small computers nowadays. (TP #10)

The digital devices also played a role in maintaining their work-life balance and in deciding where to work at which times on which work tasks, including the decision to hire third workspaces. The careful tuning of particular work activities to the various workspaces is enabled by the stark separation between the *content* of the work and the *shape* of the workspace. This separation is affected by the use of digital technologies, which largely contain the actual work activities. These technologies to a considerable extent 'decorporealise' the work of third workspace users (Brown and O'Hara, 2003: 1583–1585). The work may involve emailing, telephoning, (making) appointments, (arranging) meetings, (re)searching (on the Internet), searching for jobs and prospects, administrative tasks, updating websites and social media sites, writing documents and programming.

Maintaining boundaries

Whereas home workers or office workers usually have to guard one main boundary, the private-corporate, third workspace users demarcate their work activities on the one side with reference to their private life and on the other side with reference to their business life. In this sense third workspaces are neither entirely private nor entirely business spaces. They are literally used as transitional 'in between' spaces, what anthropologists would call 'liminal spaces' (Turner, 1969). It is a space 'at the boundary of two dominant spaces, which is not fully part of either' (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 238).

The maintenance of the home borderline, which each informant constituted differently, represented one (the push) of the two main drivers (push and pull) for engaging with third workspaces. Some considered the home to be their primary workspace; others regarded it as a marginal workspace, as in the case of this self-employed quality manager:

> I do not mind working at home in the evenings and in the weekends from time to time. And if I do not want to be available then I shut everything down including my mobile phone. But for my work-life balance it is really nice to be able to work here at MP. (MP #5)

In part, the third workspace was valued for separating work from private life. Some work activities are better done at home because it is more convenient (involves no transport and can be combined with looking after children), can be done quickly (such as checking email or answering a phone call) or, at the other

extreme, it takes extensive time and a high level of concentration (such as reading and writing). Within the sample of informants there were huge differences where people actually drew the line between working at home and working at the third workspace. For instance, some preferred to do concentrated work at the third workspace, whereas others, similar to the consultants mentioned by Hislop and Axtell (2009: 69), preferred the home for concentrated work.

The benefits constituted the second main (pull) driver for engaging with third workspaces. Socialising and sharing work experiences was for instance an important driver for the self-employed at MP. Almost all of them mentioned the desire to work among like-minded individuals as a main reason for working at MP. At home they lacked a vibrant and supportive work atmosphere, as these quotes illustrate:

> I do not like working at home alone behind my computer. The main reason why I come here are the contacts I have with other people… (MP #2) … In fact, I could work those other three days at home, but it is not the same without fellow workers. So I come here for the other workers… (MP #4)

At MP almost all informants engaged in small talk and social interaction with peers. Most started their workday with a ritual chat with fellow users. The coffee corner and especially the lunch breaks were appreciated opportunities for interaction. At MP new contacts were usually initiated during the informal lunch setting. After initial contacts snowballing sometimes led to extended socialising: 'Once you know a couple of people, you get introduced by them to other people. And at some point you get to know a lot of people here…' (MP #6). To a certain extent, these interactions concerned the exchange of work experiences, especially in sparring encounters and by improving personal work skills with the aid of others, as this self-employed job counsellor explains:

> That is the advantage of working here, I knew that Wendy had the knowledge of how you should do this, so I went to speak to her, and asked her if she wanted to help me. And then I was quickly able to do it by myself. And that would never have happened otherwise, so that really happened because of this place. (MP #2)

However, comparable to the line the informants had to draw between the home and the third workspace, within the third workspace they had to draw a line between working and socialising: 'I think it's ok to have some small talk and to be social, but not too much. I have days here that I have too much contact with others, that is the balance that I have to watch' (MP #5). Although at MP interaction with fellow users constituted a significant drive and a significant feature of the perceived space, this interaction hardly evolved into the networking and co-working relationships of MP's work ideology, with some exceptions, which will be discussed in the section on the lived space.

Regarding the level of social interactions, there was a significant difference in the perceived space of TP, compared to MP. The TP users were more concerned with maintaining the focus on their work, with avoiding distractions. And where MP informants ranked the social atmosphere among one of the first motives to favour MP, the TP informants ranked the quiet, business-like atmosphere and the office facilities first in their motives to favour TP. They frequently mentioned strategies they used to protect their privacy and that of others, for instance by walking away when answering a phone. At TP privacy was a much appreciated attitude, for instance by this senior project manager:

> Privacy is an atmosphere you build around you … Myself, I am used to open office spaces. So, privacy is something, well yes, it is kind of an invisible wall you build around you … In this space I am not easily disturbed, because you also tend to accept more [distractions] in a public space. (TP #3)

In short, where the MP informants tended to demarcate the third workspace primarily from the home, the TP informants rather compared it to a corporate office. Most TP informants especially appreciated the 'professional', 'neat', 'quiet'

and 'business-like' atmosphere of TP. Some defined TP as 'representational' and as a 'neutral territory' for meeting clients, whom they definitely would not like to receive at home (TP #6). This head hunter in fact so much embraced the idea of a corporate office that she would not want clients to know that she actually did not have an office of her own:

> They [clients] do not always have to know that I use a flexible workspace and do not have an office of my own … This has to do with my image, of course … They might believe that you have an office. And if it turns out that you don't have an office, people may think 'That's odd. Why do they not have an office? Can't they afford that, or what?' (TP #8)

The 'impression management' of this head hunter clearly included the 'setting of interaction', one of the requirements for working on the move outlined by Felstead *et al.* (2005: 160).

An important reason for restrained social interaction at third workspaces, especially at TP, lay in the variety in the nature of the work; the services, the markets and the kind of knowledge of the informants. Judged from the occupations of the interviewees, the TP workspace may at the same moment be shared by occupations as diverse as that of a salesman, an IT specialist, an accountant, a job counsellor, a project manager, a teacher, a business consultant or a head hunter.

'Work restaurants'

This account of the perceived space makes clear that third workspaces represent a new spatial ensemble characterised by a specific type of work practice in between the home and the corporate office. This work practice can be characterised with features which are in line with Oldenburg's characterisation of third places (Oldenburg, 1989: 20–42). As discussed above and comparable to Oldenburg's typology, the informants demarcate third workspaces from the private home with features such as 'neutral ground', 'accessibility and accommodation' and the presence of 'regulars'. On the other hand the third workspaces are demarcated from formal work by features such as 'low profile' of the setting, 'equality' among the users and 'conversation' as the primary shared activity (instead of co-working). In some respects the third workspaces differ from Oldenburg's characterisation, mainly because the places deal with work rather than leisure. Therefore, Oldenburg's features of a 'home from home' and a 'playful mood' as such do not connect with third workspaces. Instead, these features could be modified as either 'work away from home' or 'work away from the office', and either a 'stimulating work atmosphere' or a 'relaxed work atmosphere', dependent on whether these features are defined with reference to the home or the work situation. From Oldenburg's perspective, third workspaces could very well be characterised as a kind of 'work restaurants'. The third workspaces of this study come close to Brown and O'Hara (2003: 1577) prediction that 'we have yet to see a pub designed for work'. Finally, the reliance on network technology, in Oldenburg's days of course not yet ubiquitously present in semi-public spaces, can be regarded as an entirely new feature.

The conceived space

This section discusses the spatial layout and logic of the two temporary workspace providers, as conceived by the designers and providers. This kind of account is typical of Lefebvre's conceived space. These are in Lefebvre's theory representations of space constructed out of symbols, codifications and abstract concepts as used by spatial professionals such as designers, IT specialists and mangers. The conceived space refers to the knowledge and discourses on workspaces, which are related to the exploitation of these workspaces. This draws our attention to

how, in the planning and design processes, knowledge and power are related to material constructions (Taylor and Spicer, 2007: 335). In the case of the third workspaces, the professional discourses explicitly situated the third workspaces as additional to the home and/or the corporate office.

It would be a mistake, of course, to assume that the conceived space of third workspaces more or less automatically makes the customers behave and believe according to the values, norms and meanings propagated by the setting and the provider. As much as road systems and traffic signs do not enforce correct behaviour in traffic, the conceived workspace does not simply enforce the normative order of flexible working. Nevertheless, this study suggests that the conceived space of the third workspaces reinforces in two ways the confinement of work in between the home and the corporate office. First, the conceived space sets *constraints* on the use of these spaces. The more or less explicit definitions may be called upon if and when a customer does not move within the margins of the conceived space. Second, the providers *inscribe* desirable behaviour in their facilities and spatial arrangements. Just like technological artefacts, workspaces and work facilities contain 'scripts' (Akrich, 1992; Suchman, 2007) informing users about what actions should be undertaken, when, where and how. TP and MP personnel, therefore, expected that the larger part of the customers would more or less instinctively appreciate and agree with the suggested framework and the range of workspace options, as well as comply willingly. The analysis of the conceived space typically addresses the predefined spatio-technological order, and focuses on the discourses and scripts regarding the design and facilitated use of third workspaces.

Time and privacy

The establishments of TP were all designed according to the same spatiotemporal logic of a cost-effective dispersed work setting with basic options for increasing levels of temporal presence and privacy. The buildings are divided in four zones (Figure 1).

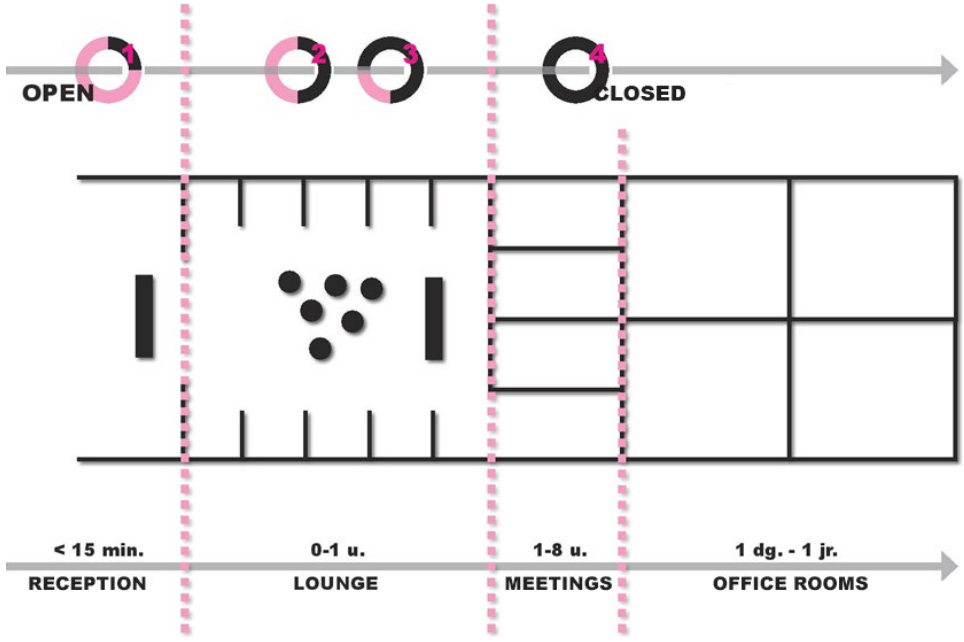


Figure 1: The spatial logic of time and privacy at TP

The further you move to the back of the establishments, the further privatised the workspaces become. The first zone is the reception area, equipped with the reception desk and a few seats, and 'manned' by a receptionist. Immediately behind this transition zone is the 'Business lounge' characterised by an open office space, which enables interaction as well as concentrated working at the reading table or a desk. This lounge also contains some 'thinkspots' and 'campusspots': individually shielded desks with a chair, intended for work which requires some concentration and confidentiality. In addition, the lounge also contains a few isolated spaces, the so called 'coupé-lounges'. The business lounge is intended for short stays in which people, in the jargon of TP, 'land' and 'take off' again. Adjacent the business lounge are a few meeting rooms. These rooms can be rented by the hour. The fourth and final zone at the back of the establishments consists of a number of private offices intended for separate working. These private offices can be rented on a daily, weekly or even permanent basis. With this degree of workspace differentiation TP offers workspace in a continuous range from five minutes and minimum privacy up to a complete workday with maximum privacy. For the entire workspace TP offers electronic networking facilities, including Wi-Fi and printing facilities, as well as some basic services, such as managing the reception desk and servicing coffee, tea and sandwiches.

In its business philosophy TP positioned its third workspace first and foremost as a convenient workspace in easy reach of private homes, thus reducing people's demands and uncertainties of long commutes. As the marketing manager of TP said: '… the whole philosophy behind our workspace is that you work where you happen to pass by at a certain moment in time—work at the nearest site' (TP #14). TP also explicitly sought to maintain a particular standard and atmosphere of business-like professionalism, which was partly facilitated by the clean, open, efficient and transparent spatial design, dominated by white colours and glass as material for walls and doors; this atmosphere was symbolised by the continuous display of a business TV channel on a TV screen. TP's target group consisted of highly educated knowledge workers with corporate contracts; self-employed individuals and mobile workers were appreciated in addition to this category.

Interaction and co-working

There were significant differences between the two temporary workspace providers with reference to the expected degrees of interaction and co-working. In contrast with TP, MP specifically targeted self-employed individuals. At MP self-employed people were offered workspaces for free in exchange for their willingness to share their cultural capital. As the manager of the MP establishment explained:

> Many people not only generate sales volume but also generate knowledge value, because they possess some kind of knowledge. This knowledge can possibly be made available to others. And in our workspace, this knowledge can actually be shared and creates business value; and because of this added value you do not have to pay for our workspace, because you already bring in another kind of value … (MP #10)

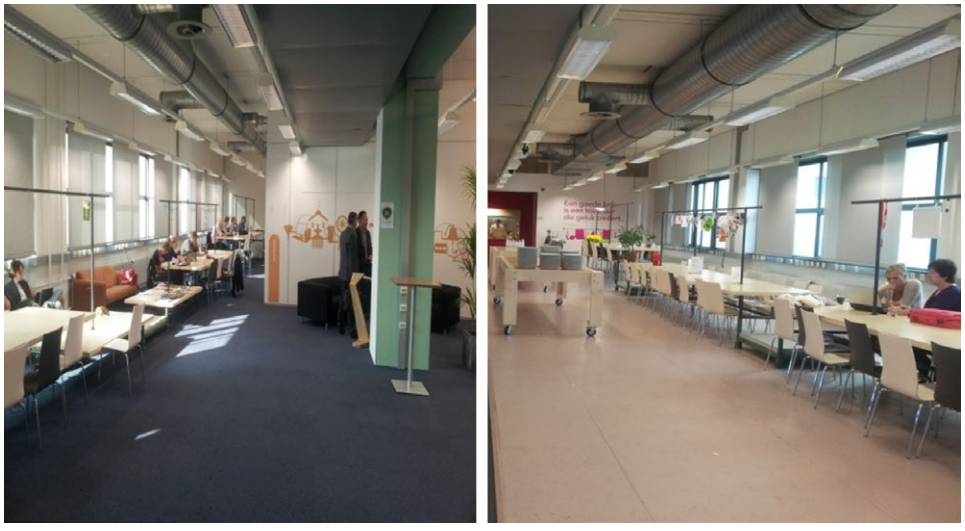
The category of self-employed workers is a significant and growing part of the Dutch working population; between 1996 and 2014 this category grew from 6.4 to 10.9 per cent of the Dutch working population (CBS). This category constitutes a (growth) market for all third workspace providers. Although in numbers the self-employed constitute a significant category of potential workers for third workspace providers, financially they are considered a less profitable category. MP even provided the workspace to the self-employed for free; financially, MP relied on renting temporary meeting spaces and conference rooms to larger firms.

Compared to TP, MP's workspace was less differentiated, with overall a greater focus on shared workspaces. The MP floor of the building consisted of 18 meeting rooms, which were for rent and differed in size and equipment, ranging from two person offices to a 200 person sized conference room. At MP there was a single open office space, 'the square', to be used for free (including Wi-Fi, drinks and lunch), and which facilitated the self-employed of the case study. At MP one had to work at tables and chairs situated along the borders of the spacious square, an arrangement which was intended to s(t)imulate interaction (see Picture 1).

Compared to TP there were less opportunities for shielded or privatised office work. The free lunches at MP were explicitly intended to stimulate interaction among users. At MP there were no printing facilities because MP wanted to promote 'paperless working'.

The MP users had to reserve the third workspaces online, and while making a reservation they simultaneously had to enter their interests and area of expertise. So, in contrast to TP, at MP every customer could at any moment check who was in the house. With reference to Pine and Korn's (2011) typology of hybrid spaces, third workspaces such as MP and TP can be situated somewhere in the middle of a 'multiverse' with various combinations and levels of physical and virtual facilities, ranging from 'augmented reality' (virtual information added to material settings) to 'mirrored virtuality' (completely virtual environment).

This conception of third workspaces, as a hybrid and new kind of flexible workspace situated in between the home and the corporate office (and in between the material and the virtual office), may indeed be regarded as the leading rationale guiding the development and management of TP and MP. However, this understanding neither entirely covers nor necessarily corresponds with the perceived space and the fully lived space as experienced and imagined by the users. Third workspace users may experience their use and work behaviour in many different and perhaps unexpected ways, dependent on the way they integrate third workspaces in their overall workscapes. These users may experience the third workspaces with a 'social imagery' quite different from flexible working or even challenge this objective. In extreme cases they may even perceive third workspaces as if they were private spaces or, at the other extreme, as if they were corporate spaces.



Picture 1: Tables situated along the borders of the 'square' of MP

The lived space

Whereas the perceived space in Lefebvre's theory refers to the way space is experienced in the largely self-evident routines of everyday life, the lived space refers to the way space is explicitly experienced in the creative and often critical moments in which we actively reflect upon space in our spatial imaginations. The lived space of the case studies revealed a new 'space of representations' regarding spatial reflexivity, work facilities, interaction, knowledge sharing, email replies and presence. Alternative meanings regarding such work performances can be related to the concentration of work in third workspaces, in two ways. First, the informants presented all the lived representations of these performances as *exceptions* to the perceived or to the conceived space. Third workspaces exclude various kinds of work performances, which are perhaps more suited for the home or the corporate office. In this respect representations of the exceptional reveal the boundaries of what is considered appropriate behaviour at third workspaces.

Second, the representations of the exceptional can be understood as referring to maximal *standards*. In practice third workspaces enable a wider, but less pronounced range of these representations: limited reflexivity, basic facilities, superficial interaction, postponed scheduling and occasional presence. In fact, moderate work performances represent the dominant work mode of third workspaces; this mode resides in the *moderation* of work performances, rather than in particular representations such as for instance the sharing of knowledge. For example, in third workspaces there is a flexible range of (unpredictable) physical presence, in combination with (almost permanent) presence in the virtual work environment. Moderate positions on continuums of reflexivity–routine, poor–complete facilities, interactivity–passivity, immediately–occasionally and presence–absence are part and parcel of third workspace experiences. The analysis of the lived space typically addresses the establishment of meaningful connections, and focuses on the active and reflexive appropriation and modification of third workspaces.

Reflexivity

Third workspaces are associated with a relatively high level of spatial reflexivity, compared to permanent workspaces, first and foremost because the number and frequency of workspace decisions increases, as the manager of TP explained:

> You have to plan 'when will I sit here? When am I going to work in a day office?' For that you have to make a reservation. If I work here, it differs from a permanent office where you walk to your desk, where you open your own closet, where your stuff is ordered and your computer is ready to use. … 'Am I going to move my stuff around, or do I prefer a traditionally fixed space?'… People are creatures of habit. You have to rearrange your work. (TP #13)

Space is a constant practical concern for third workspace users, comparable to mobile workers (Brown and O'Hara, 2003). Compared to the permanent office or the home office, third workspace users have to deal with less predictability, less privacy and less workspace personalisation. This is all more or less compensated for by the use of electronic devices as the new constants in their lives. In this respect thirdspace workers are like cyborgs: half human and half machine. It is important to realise that this mixture of physical and virtual elements is not readily available at third workspaces. Third workspace users add their own equipment, and creatively have to compose and manage this mixture themselves. With these actions, users literally make third workspaces work, and give meaning to them.

Extended interfaces

Third workspaces derive meaning from the creative construction of extended interfaces (the meaningful mix of material and virtual elements). In a narrow sense digital devices such as laptops and smartphones may be characterised as the immediate interfaces between the third workspace and the virtual environment. However, in a broader sense, the interface is only effectively constituted by a physical platform in combination with these devices. And it is only in these combinatory acts that the virtual environment is actualised. These acts of combination could be referred to in terms of the creation of an 'extended interface', which is at the heart of the constitution of third workspaces.

Many, perhaps minor, critical reflections by users on the third workspaces had to do with these acts of combination and concerned practical facilities and services. Some complained about connectivity problems. At MP some regretted the absence of printing facilities. Some also complained about the traditional opening hours of MP and TP, which were not open in the evenings and on weekends, thus limiting the options for workspace flexibility. Although perhaps minor details, such issues could seriously hinder the work flow and work experience. In this category some informants also referred to distractions by fellow users, noise because of talks and phone calls or irritations over unclean furniture.

Particularly interesting moments of reflection concerned those who explicitly compared the workspaces of TP and MP. One informant (TP #10) in fact made use of third workspaces almost all week long, roughly equally divided over TP and MP; in addition, during weekends, he sometimes worked in a hotel lobby. Decisive regarding his decision to opt for the one or the other establishment were the expected phone calls, for which in his view TP provided more suitable levels of privacy and confidentiality. Another TP user (#11), familiar with both workspaces, accounted for his preference for TP over MP with reference to TP's more business-like appearances, which in his view better matched with his work as an accountant.

Individualised workspaces

Significant reflections concerned the discrepancies between the conceived and the perceived space. Of particular interest were, as mentioned previously, the unsuccessful attempts at MP to stimulate networking and co-working. Only one example of co-working initiated at the third workspace was encountered during the fieldwork. This example concerned two informants at MP who did not know each other before they started their respective self-employed consultancy and sales businesses. One day they informally met over lunch at MP. They soon found out that they had a shared interest in horses. Over several lunches they discussed the idea of actually making a business out of this interest. Ultimately they developed a business plan concerning a service in which they would train and coach people in their personal competencies on the basis of interaction with horses. Because only one example of co-working was encountered during fieldwork, this example should be regarded as the exception rather than the rule, the more so because other interviewees as well as the MP manager confirmed that they had heard of only few of such initiatives. Some were convinced that this had to do with the passive approach of MP management:

> The community part of MP is falling behind. … I really believe that if you want to take advantage of people being together, you have to have an intake talk … about what is expected of them and what kind of mind set is required here. And that it is expected of them to help build something. And that you not only come to benefit [from the facilities] but also come to contribute [knowledge]. There has to be a balance in this. Now, there is no commitment … (MP #5)

Presence

The use of digital devices within third workspaces represent the flexworker as almost permanently present in the virtual work environment (and unpredictably present in the physical environment). Regarding the digital devices, for instance the use of email was implied in the lived space of third workspaces. Email often involves conscious strategies as to how to maintain the work-life balance, as argued by this quality manager:

> That is the pitfall of technology, because you are so connected you are always available for others. And people are coming to a point where they are expecting you to react fast to their emails. And as an entrepreneur you will probably partly have to react fast. (MP #5)

Of course it is not simply the technology that makes people available, but rather the reliance on the technology and the expectation of availability. An almost immediate response to email appeared to be the rule rather than the exception at third workspaces; this finding is consistent with more extensive and specific research on the use of smartphones (Mazmanian *et al.*, 2013). However, the fieldwork revealed a more nuanced picture with roughly three email strategies. The first strategy concerned those who answered almost all emails as quickly as possible. The second strategy concerned a random or opportunity-based answering of email. The third strategy emerged from a dissatisfaction with a problematical timing and the volume of email traffic. A specific strategy to deal with this involved the allocation of particular moments for answering email, as explained by this business consultant:

> I used to always respond immediately as soon as I saw an [email] message light blinking…. But I do not do this anymore because I lose my focus in the work that I am doing. And it takes a while to regain that focus. So that is less efficient. So every morning around nine I look at my emails. And I answer the important ones, and the ones that can wait I put in a to do folder. And then I check my email again after lunch and at the end of the day. (MP #8)

Finally, the fieldwork revealed huge differences in the actual presence at third workspaces. Although all users should clearly be classified as flexible, the actual use of third workspaces could range from a few hours per week up to a complete workweek. During the fieldwork one example was observed of an office space at TP which was used in a more or less permanent way. The users of this room even had put a large sticker with their company logo on the glass door.

Conclusions

This study analysed the expansion of contemporary workspaces with specialised third workspaces in between the home and the corporate office. Third workspaces rely on electronic networks for the maintenance of work relationships. However, one could also reason the other way around, namely that the emergence of digital network infrastructures, in particular the Internet, enabled the expansion of work spaces beyond the corporate office. For analysing this interaction between work and the material settings, use was made of Lefebvre's analytical distinctions among 'perceived space' (spatial practice), 'conceived space' (representations of space) and 'lived space' (spaces of representation) (Goonewardena *et al.*, 2008; Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]; Shields, 1999; Watkins, 2005; Soja, 1996). These dimensions always operate together, although the relative importance of these dimensions is context dependent and may vary over time (Shields, 1999: 167). This also means that actual coherence between these dimensions is an empirical rather than a theoretical issue. In this respect the case studies reflect the popular and largely unproblematic nature of third workspaces because the fieldwork did not reveal serious conflicts and resistance. This, of course, can partly be

attributed to the great freedom of choice of the users and the absence of non-users in the research. It is in the dialectical interactions between the spatial dimensions from which the constitution of third workspaces such as TP and MP emerged. As we have seen in the case of TP and MP, users as well as providers adapted the spatial routines and formats to the alternative spatial awareness signalled by the lived space, not only regarding such mundane aspects as connectivity problems but also regarding idealistic expectations regarding co-working initiatives.

The constitution of third workspaces in between the home and the corporate office was more specifically informed by Oldenburg's concept of 'third places' (Oldenburg, 1989) and Soja's concept of 'thirdspace' (Soja, 1996). Oldenburg's concept proved particularly helpful for situating third workspaces as in between the home and the corporate office, thus stressing the informality and permissiveness of the mutual relations within third workspaces. In this respect third workspaces have in this study been characterised as a kind of 'work restaurants'.

Soja's concept proved particularly helpful for associating third workspaces with a new creative and critical spatial awareness. Third workspaces can in this sense be understood as 'generative', 'liminal' and 'incomplete' spaces which provoke creative use (Kornberger and Clegg, 2005). The analysis was directed at developing an analytical framework for third workspaces, as summarised in Table 2. This table starts at the left with Lefebvre's three ways of knowing space. These epistemological perspectives are operationalised in three dimensions for defining third workspaces, which concern the flexibilisation of spatial practice, the virtualisation of spatial designs and the active connection between spatial practice and the virtual environment in terms of 'interfacialisation'. Interfacialisation is an appropriate term here because, as we have seen, the lived space of third workspaces is dominated by the use of technological interfaces by means of which users actively give meaning to third workspaces. From the left to the right, in Table 2 we gradually move from the abstract to the concrete account of third workspaces, as derived from the case studies.

In this concluding section, three ways will be highlighted in which material and work relations interact in the constitution of third workspaces.

First, a third workspace is not a well-defined and recognised work facility every worker is constantly aware of. This makes the integration of a third workspace in the everyday work practice of special significance to its users, who bring the third workspaces within their 'awareness context' (Glaser and Strauss, 1964). The users of third workspaces dissociate work relations from material space and associate work relations with virtual business space. Third workspaces escape the familiarities and personal commitments of private life as well as the formal and coercive overtones of corporate life.

Second, the integration of third workspaces in the overall 'workscapes' (Felstead *et al.*, 2005) of the users did not imply the end of home working and/or working at corporate offices. Instead, the formation of a new confined workspace resulted in a new hybrid work setting with basic office facilities and personalised network technologies such as laptops and smartphones. The constraints and prescriptions of third workspaces follow a logic of increasing temporal presence and personal privacy. The users related, as we have seen, their understanding of the third workspace to their personal as well as work preferences. This led to a rather random but 'happily anticipated' gathering of workers at third workspaces. Consequently, third workspaces should not be conceived as one-dimensional phenomena, but rather constitute a differentiated range of third workspaces, of which some are more physically and others are more technologically defined. Also, whereas some third workspace providers aim at stimulating interaction and co-working, others primarily facilitate individualised work. In this respect we saw marked differences between the third workspaces of MP and TP.

Third, crucial to the constitution of third workspaces is the construction of 'extended interfaces' by the users. They creatively combine material and virtual

Table 2: The Lefebvrian conceptualisation of third workspaces

Lefebvre's production of space	Third workspaces		
Spatial triad: (epistemology)	Defining processes: (ontology)	Main research objects:	Substantive processes:
Perceived space (spatial practice)	Flexibilisation	Spatio-temporal interactions (routines/(un-) intended consequences)	A new basic work environment; Reliance on virtual network technology; Norms dissociating from private as well as corporate life
Conceived space (representations of space)	Virtualisation	Predefined spatio-technological order (constraints / opportunities)	Confined settings facilitating various degrees of presence and privacy; Preset standards for interaction and co-working; Hybrid 'space of flows' (combinations of material and virtual facilities)
Lived space (representational space)	Interfacialisation	Meaningful connections Appropriation and modification (agency/ reflexivity)	Critical reflexivity on work arrangements; Creative construction of 'extended interfaces'; Individual freedom of choice; Permanent presence in virtual environment

elements to effectively work online. For them, the basic office facilities of third workspaces, which they combine with personal laptops and smartphones, constitute a (new) meaningful whole. In the critical and creative moments of putting the two together, third workspace users set new standards in which they make distinctions between offline and online work, and where to perform the various work activities (at home, at the office, at a third workspace or mobile). In this way third workspaces enable the continuity of work relations across a wide range of workspaces and enable the almost permanent presence of its users in the virtual work environment. This signals a new spatial awareness in the sense of Lefebvre's 'lived space' and Soja's 'thirdspace' (Soja, 1996). By addressing exceptions on appropriate behaviour and moderating instrumental work relations users explore and define the symbolical order of third workspaces. In this respect Lefebvre's dialectic reveals a paradoxical relationship between third workspaces and work relations. While the spatialisation of work in third workspaces enables the continuity of work, this environment at the same time seems to moderate the work performances.

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